Utah Tribes - Ute

Tribal Leaders

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About the White Mesa Utes

General Information

White Mesa is a small community, 380 residents, located 12 miles south of Blanding, Utah. The governmental structure consists of a 7 member board, 1 member of the board sits on the Tribal Council in Towaoc, Colorado where the tribal headquarter is located.

White Mesa Ute Council was established in 1978 with a 9 member board that has had the responsibility of overseeing program services for the citizens. For generations we have struggled to make changes. Our being so isolated from our headquarters has been a difficult situation and a hindrance from day one. Our heritage has served us well and our independence became our strength.

The goal of the Board has been, and is, to assist the people of White Mesa to become educated and self-sufficient by providing program services for their needs. Education, Headstart, CHR, Social Services, Recreation, Senior Citizens, Community Development, Cattle Company and a Convenience Store, are some of the programs which provide employment for community members. In the earlier years, when White Mesa Ute Council was just getting off the ground, we had only a few program services but gradually we became larger and employed more people. In the past our education programs were almost nonexistent as we did not have students graduating. Today we have students not only graduating from high school but now students and parents are enrolled in the higher education programs. The Board invested in a scholarship program with community members serving on the Scholarship Committee. Our Headstart Program graduates a large number of students almost every year. The Recreation program provides services for both youths and adults alike. Our boxing team consists of youth and young adults who travel to boxing matches each year. A youth basketball team is ongoing with both male and female participants who travel to tournaments with community members, who serve as coaches, all participants enjoy being together. A Senior Citizen program provides meals three times a week to all the elderly, and also provides shopping trips all of which the elderly enjoy. The Convenience Store employs a few of our community members and has been an asset to our community. It is within walking distance for both young and old to do their shopping when they run out of small items. The board members have extended their services to help school, city, and county needs and events.

The administrations greatest task is to assess the changing conditions regarding resources while keeping in touch with the needs of the

community, then to complete the requirements for funding to meet the needs. White Mesa has been designated as a voting precinct by San Juan County after 3 years of planning, with over 75% of community members voting in the elections.

Our annual festivities begin with our "Bear Dance" on or around the Labor Day weekend. The Bear Dance is a social dance which the people celebrate to welcome the coming of Spring. But as the bear dance season ends we are the last Ute community to celebrate the event which signifies "Thankfullness".

Other events are a Softball Tournament that is scheduled, starting Thursday and ending on Sunday. Ten women's and men's teams enter the tournament from surrounding communities. Hand Games or Stick Games last two days. Also there is the annual Pow Wow with dancers and tribal members competing in all facets of competition. Country and western dancing is a three night event where live bands play for the people's entertainment and enjoyment.

About the Utes Tribe

The Land

The home of the Ute Indian Tribe is the Uintah and Ouray (U & O) Reservation, located within a three-county area in Northeastern Utah, known as the "Uinta Basin", and covers a large portion of western Uintah and eastern Duchesne Counties. This vast reservation is a virtual storehouse of Mesozoic wealth. Hydrocarbons in a multitude of forms that have been trapped beneath the surface for millions of years are now being mined. Oil and gas, tar sands, oil shale and gilsonite are in abundant supply. On the surface of this hydrocarbon wealth are large areas of natural forest, fish and game preserves, and farming and grazing lands with considerable water resources.

The opening and settlement of the U & O Reservation in 1905 brought with it a checker- board pattern of ownership and jurisdiction. Today's surface ownership of the Uinta Basin is a mixture of Federal Lands (50.5%), Fee Lands (23.8%), Tribal Trust Lands (17.5%) and State of Utah Lands (8.2%0. The Ute Tribe, with slightly less than one million acres has ownership of almost 1/4 of the Uinta Basin's total land area. However, the ownership of the surface does not necessarily mean ownership of the minerals. A large area of land, known as the Hill Creek Extension is tribally owned with mineral rights being owned by the Federal Government. Oil and gas production from this land represents 1/4 of the oil and gas produced in

Uintah County. Because of this mixed ownership, getting access to the wealth requires numerous jurisdictional clearances, requiring more time, cost and jurisdictional cooperation than is required in most oil and gas producing areas within the United States. Notwithstanding the fact that production of these resources is important to the future development of the entire region, community confrontation and conflict are a constant threat to the process.

The People

According to the Tribe's Department of Vital Statistics, the enrolled membership of the Ute Tribe is presently 3120 members. This population has grown from about 2500 members in 1980 and is projected to increase to 4,672 by the year 2010. Eighty-five percent (or about 2650) presently live within the boundaries of the Reservation. The population of the Tribe living on the Reservation is made up of 703 households. Of the families making up those households, 345 (or 49%) fall into the very low income category and 147 (or 21%) are in the low income category. The average size of families making up these two categories is 4.15 people. The statistics indicated above are further compounded when the senior citizen of the Ute Tribe are considered. Like most communities in Rural America, the aging population of the Ute Indian Tribe is growing.

The Government

The Ute Indian Tribe is made up of three bands - the Uintah, the White River, and the Uncompander. Two representatives from each of these bands are elected to serve four year terms on the Business Committee, the governing council of the Tribe. This council makes decisions that govern the Tribe by resolution. Community Presidents from the five communities that make up the population base of the Reservation bring public issues and concerns to the Business Committee, whose responsibility it is to make final decisions regarding them. Governmental procedures are implemented in accordance with the Tribe's Constitution and By Laws that were established and adopted in 1937.

The organizational structure of the Ute Tribe is complete. As with most other governmental entities, departments have been established to carry out administrative functions. These departments include Legal, Human Resources, Accounting and Auditing, revenues and Taxation, Resource Management, Fish and Wildlife Management, Environmental and Cultural Protection, Vital Statistics, Social Services and Health Care, Education and Training, Seniors and Aging, Youth Programs, Community and Economic Development, Fire and Emergency Response, Motor Pool, Property and

Supply, Police and Security, Judicial Systems, and others. Additionally, the Tribe operates several tribal enterprises that are designed to provide services for the membership and to produce revenue for the Tribe.

Protocol

The Tribal Council will not make decisions on any issue unless that issue is addressed publicly at a regularly scheduled Council meeting. Anyone who has an issue or proposal to be addressed by the Council must schedule time on a meeting agenda, and submit supporting documents, at least seven days before the item is to be addressed. It is customary for items of business to be screened by an appropriate tribal department prior to bringing them to the Business Committee. This procedure can be implemented by calling the Business Committee Office at (435) 722-5161 between the hours of 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM Monday through Friday.

Other Resources

The Utes Today - Utah Indian Affairs

White Mesa Ute Board - Utah Indian Affairs